Interest amounting to Rs. 3,642 crore approx. (Rs. 834.22 crore, Rs. 1,952.84 crore, Rs. 640.80 crore and Rs. 214.12 crore in Maharashtra, A.P., Karnataka and Kerala respectively) have been waived while loans worth Rs. 10,696 crore (Rs. 1,384 crore, 7,260 crore, 1,249 and Rs. 803 crore in Maharashtra, A.P., Karantaka and Kerala respectively) have been rescheduled in these districts.

Besides, in the Union Budget 2008-09, the Government has announced a Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme for farmers, which stipulates waiver of all loans disbursed by Scheduled Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative Credit Institutions before 31.3.2007, that were overdue on 31.12.2007 and which remained unpaid until 29.2.2008 for small farmers (land holding between 1 and 2 hecatares) and marginal farmers (land holding upto 1 hectare). In respect of other farmers (land holding more than 2 hecatares), there is a One Time Settlement (OTS) Scheme for all loans that were overdue on 31.12.2007 and which remained unpaid until 29.2.2008. The OTS provides a rebate of 25% against payment of the balance amount of 75%. Government estimates that about three crore small and marginal farmers and about one crore other farmers including the farmers of Vidarbha, whose loans are overdue on 31.12.2007 will benefit from the scheme.

Cases of bogus caste certificates in nationalised banks

4220. SHRI PRAVEEN RASHTRAPAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware about the recent judgement delivered in the case of Yogesh Ramchandra Naikwadi who claimed to be Scheduled Tribe on the basis of bogus caste certificate; and

(b) if so, what action is proposed by the Ministry on the hundreds of bogus caste certificate cases in Nationalised Banks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) and (b) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Exemption of taxes in Sikkim

4221. SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS:
SHRI RUDRA NARAYAN PANY:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether certain groups of citizens who call themselves as original Indians in Sikkim, have represented against discrimination in respect of exemption from taxes as compared to the rest of population in Sikkim;

(b) if so, whether any inquiry has been held or planned to be held;

(c) whether any such inquiry has revealed any discrimination;

(d) if so, the action taken thereon; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Representations have been received from certain groups of

citizens residing in Sikkim requesting for grant of exemption from income tax on the same lines as the exemption proposed to be granted to those citizens residing in Sikkim who are enrolled in the Register of Sikkim Subjects maintained under Sikkim Subjects Regulations, 1961 read with Sikkim Subject Rules, 1961 and subsequent Government orders.

(b) and (c) The respresentations have been examined. The tax exemption, as proposed under clause 4(a) of the Finance Bill, 2008, is in respect of specified income accruing or arising to a 'Sikkimese'. The definition of the term 'Sikkimese' for this purpose has been finalized in consultation with the Government of Sikkim and is based on the Register of Sikkim Subjects maintained under Sikkim Subjects Regulation, 1961 read with Sikkim Subject Rules, 1961 and subsequent Government orders issued in this regard. The Government of Sikkim also follows the same Register and Government orders while issuing Certificates of Identification to residents of Sikkim which enables the holders of these Certificates to purchase land and seek employment in Government service in Sikkim. As there is a logical and reasonable classification of persons eligible for tax exemption, the proposed amendment is not discriminatory.

(d) and (e) In view of the above, does not arise.

Increase in prices of foodgrains and consumable goods

†4222. SHRI BHAGWATI SINGH:
SHRI BRIJ BHUSHAN TIWARI:
SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been a phenomenal increase in the prices of foodgrains, consumable goods and steel over the days;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that future trading and fiscal policies have mainly been responsibile for it;

(c) if so, whether Government has taken any effective steps to check it; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL): (a) to (d) WPI-based Inflation as on April 19, 2008 was 5.6 per cent for food grains and 35.2 per cent for Iron and steel related products. Year-on-year inflation for 30 essential comodities of common consumption was 5.9 per cent. Comparative figures of inflation as on April 21, 2007 were 8.7 per cent, 9.5 per cent and 3.2 per cent, respectively, for food grains, Iron and steel and essential commodities.

The Expert Committee constituted by the Government to study the impact of futures trading on agricultural commodity prices has mentioned that it is unable to determine any casual relationship between futures trading and wholesale/retail prices of agricultural commodities in view of short time period during which the futures market have functioned and the complexisties arise because a large number of variables impact the spot prices. Containment of inflation, however, remains high on the agenda of the Government. Anti-inflationary policies of the government include strict fiscal discipline, rationalization of

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.